

STOOPS, STEPS & RAILINGS

INTRODUCTION

Stoops, steps and/or railings that are visible from a public way require the approval of a certificate of appropriateness by the Boards of Architectural Review. Steps, stoops and railings may be replaced in-kind without a certificate of appropriateness if they meet these guidelines. In such cases, the building permit may be approved by the B.A.R. Staff.

Stoops, steps and railings are important functional elements of the entrances to buildings. At the same time, they can also have a decorative function as part of the design vocabulary of an architectural style. For example, Queen Anne style buildings typically have elaborately turned handrail balusters and newel posts.

Stoops, steps and railings provide the transition area between the public street and the private interior of a building and are an inte-

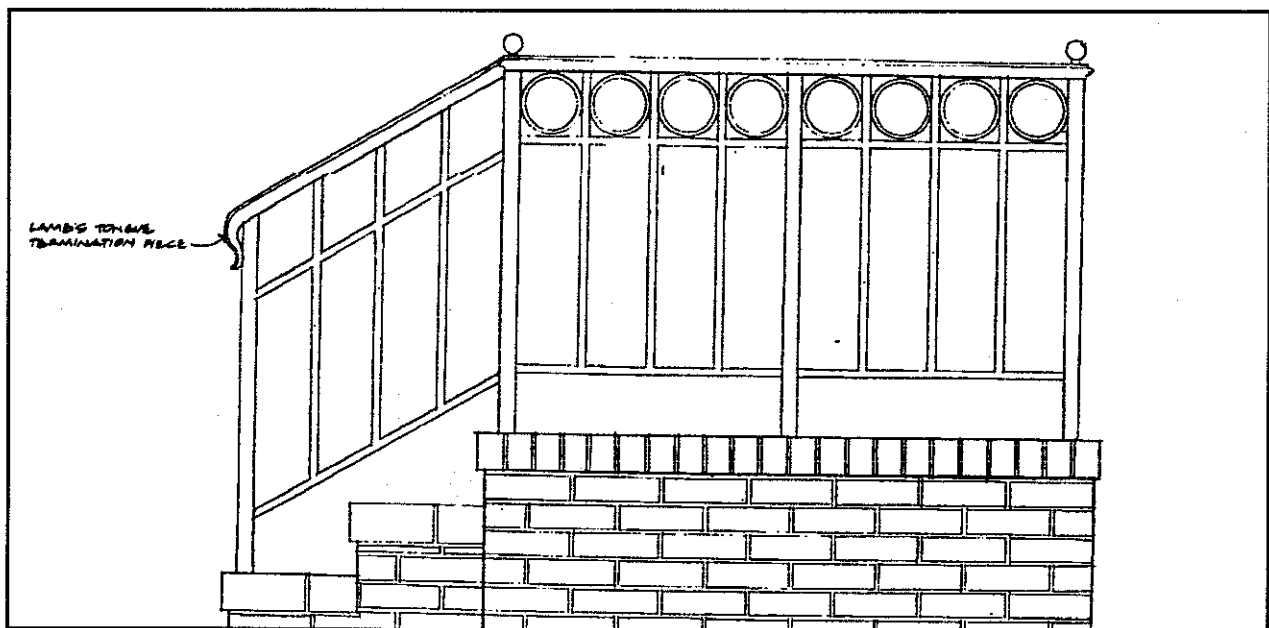
gral part of the overall architectural composition of a building.

A variety of materials have been used for the construction of stoops and steps in the historic districts including brick, wood, sandstone, limestone and cast iron.

Many historic structures in the districts have stoops, steps and railings which were built at a later time than the original structure. In some instances, these later additions may have acquired historical significance in their own right. For example, during the late-19th century many late-18th and early-19th century houses were modernized with Victorian detailing including new cast iron steps and railings. One hundred years later such Victorian era additions have acquired architectural significance and should be retained.

RETENTION OF HISTORIC MATERIALS

A central tenet of the philosophy of historic preservation is that original historic materials should be retained and repaired rather than replaced. An informed and careful analysis of the existing condition should be made before any decision to replace historic materials is made. It is often cheaper to



Elevation drawing of proposed brick stoop with painted iron railings.

SOURCE: 302-304 North Alfred Street, BAR Case #90-162, John Savage, Architect, P.C.

keep historic materials and repair them rather than replace an item with new material.

REQUIREMENTS

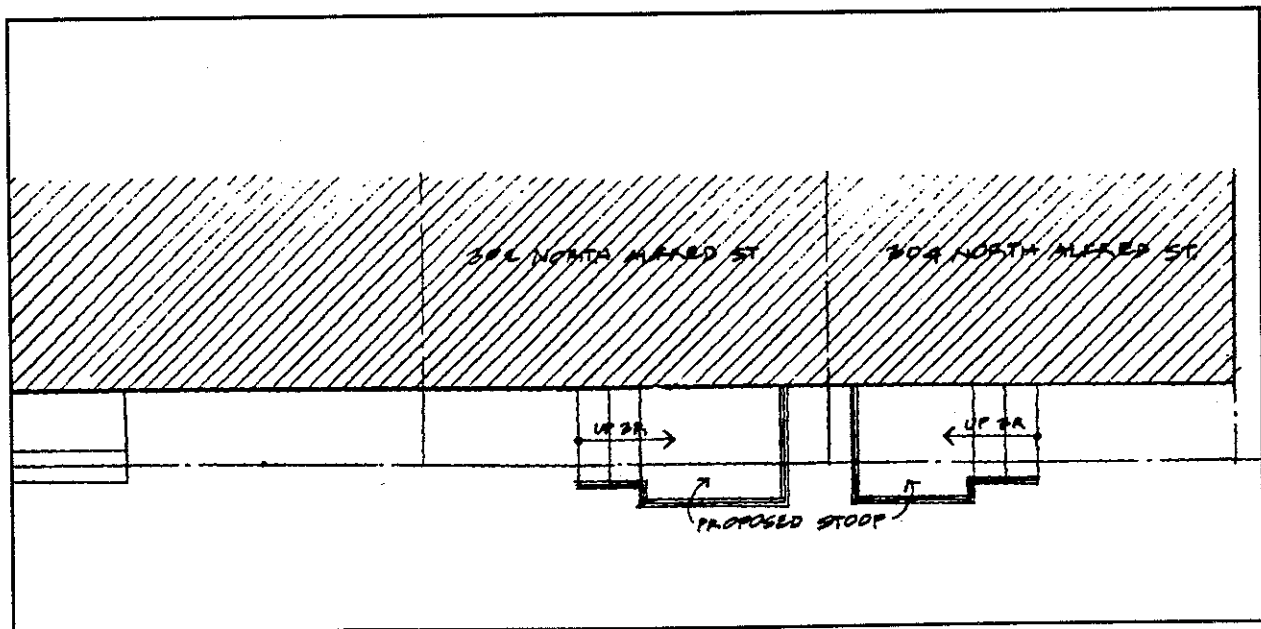
- Stoops, steps and railings must meet the requirements of the Virginia Uniform State-wide Building Code (USBC).
- A building permit is required for the construction of stoops, steps and railings.
- Handrails are required for stoops and steps except for single family dwellings or stoops which do not serve as an exit for a commercial or multi-family structure (USBC).
- Guardrails are required when there are three or more risers.
- Stoops and steps not more than 12' in length including the landing are permitted to project into the public right-of-way a specified number of feet depending upon the width of the street.
- Stoops and steps which project into the public right-of-way beyond the permitted

length must have an approved encroachment ordinance passed by City Council.

- Open steps may be located in any required yard.
- Buildings on corner lots must maintain a vision clearance at the corner for purposes of transportation safety. In such instances, stoops, steps and railings cannot exceed 42" in height. This requirement including applicable setback requirements in the zone can be waived by the B.A.R. upon application.
- A plat of the property is required at the time of application to verify yard requirements and the vision clearance.

ENCROACHMENTS FOR STOOPS AND STEPS

Stoops and steps which project past the maximum distance allowed over a public right-of-way, such as a sidewalk or alley, require approval of an encroachment ordinance by the City Council prior to installation under the provisions of § 9-104 of the Zoning Ordinance. The encroachment ordinance gives the building owner permission to utilize public space of the City for private use and



Plan of proposed stoops.

SOURCE: 302-304 North Alfred Street, BAR Case #90-162, John Savage, Architect, P.C.

requires indemnity of the City. Recommendations for encroachments are made by the Planning Commission. A separate application to the Planning Commission is required. The Planning Commission recommendations are forwarded to City Council which makes the final decision.

It is the policy of the B.A.R. to review the design of proposed stoops and steps which require encroachments before the matter is considered by the Planning Commission. The B.A.R. recommendation on the design is considered along with other factors by the Planning Commission in making a recommendation to City Council regarding the encroachment. In certain instances, the B.A.R. may determine the location of the encroachment. If the encroachment ordinance is passed by City Council, a certificate of appropriateness will be issued and an owner can erect the stoops and steps as soon after enactment of the ordinance as a building permit can be obtained.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The construction of stoops, steps and railings that create below grade footings, foundations, or that create other types of ground disturbing activities may affect archaeological resources. With its rich history, the City of Alexandria is particularly concerned about its archaeological heritage. Archaeological resources in the historic districts are great in number and highly diverse in materials. They often consist of ceramic and glass fragments in the backyards of historic properties; however, archaeological resources are also brick-lined shafts in yards and basements; brick kilns; foundations, footings, postholes and builders trenches of non-extant buildings; landscape features such as walkways and gardens; and even American Indian artifacts which pre-date colonial Alexandria. Often these clues to the City's past appear to be unimportant debris, yet when the artifacts and building remains are excavated and recorded systematically, they provide the only knowledge of lost Alexandria.

Every application to the B.A.R. which potentially involves ground disturbance is reviewed by City archaeologists to determine whether significant archaeological resources may still survive on the property. Therefore, the potential for additional requirements to protect archaeological resources exists with any project that involves ground disturbing activities.

The applicant can speed along the archaeological review

GUIDELINES

- Stoops, steps and railings should be appropriate to the historic style of the structure. For example, turned wood balusters and newel posts on entrance steps are a common feature of Victorian architecture. Decorative cast iron steps and railings are also a common feature of Victorian buildings.

- Stoops, steps and railings should not hide, obscure or cause the removal of historic architectural details. For example, railings should not interfere with the operation of door shutters.

- Stoops, steps and railings should be made of materials which are sympathetic to the building materials generally found in the historic districts. For example, concrete steps are not appropriate on 18th and 19th century buildings, but may be appropriate for 20th century structures. Pre-cast concrete that is made to resemble stone is an ap-

process by requesting a Preliminary Archaeological Assessment from Alexandria Archaeology at the earliest date. Call (703) 838-4399, Tuesday through Saturday. Alexandria Archaeology is located on the third floor of the Torpedo Factory Art Center.

• RESIDENTIAL ZONES

In residential zones, the application for construction of stoops, steps and railings that involve ground disturbing activities is reviewed by City archaeologists. In most cases, the applicant is required to notify Alexandria Archaeology before ground disturbance, so that a City archaeologist may monitor this work and record significant finds. However, when a property has a high potential for containing significant archaeological resources, a City archaeologist may request permission to excavate test samples in the affected area before the project begins.

• COMMERCIAL ZONES

In commercial zones the ground disturbing activities associated with the construction of stoops, steps and railings may necessitate compliance with the Alexandria Archaeological Protection Procedure designated pursuant to the Code of Alexandria, § 5-5-9, sub-§ (7.1), § 5-5-4 and § 5-5-9, sub-§ 1 as enacted on November 18, 1989. The specific requirements may be obtained from the City Archaeologist. Occasionally, compliance in commercial projects may require the property owner to contract with an independent archaeologist to document conditions before and during construction. Property owners should contact the City Archaeologist as early as possible so that this does not delay the project.

appropriate material in some instances. Unpainted pressure treated lumber is not an appropriate building material for stoops, steps and railings in the historic districts. Painted wood is an appropriate material for stoop, step and railing construction.

- Materials used should be appropriate and compatible with the historic architecture of the building. For example, brick is not an appropriate replacement material for a cast iron set of stairs.
- Stoops, steps and railings made of wood should generally be painted the predominant color of the building or the color of the trim-work. Black is also an appropriate color for metal stoops, steps and railings.
- Historic stoops, steps and railings should be rehabilitated, not removed. On historic structures, in some cases, the strict code requirements may be modified by the Director, Code Enforcement.
- Stoops, steps and railings should not be added in an attempt to make a structure appear older than it actually is.

APPLICATION REQUIREMENTS

In order to properly evaluate the appropriateness of proposed stoops, steps and railings, the Boards of Architectural Review require that an accurate depiction of the design be presented. Sketches that are not to scale are not acceptable. Most designs for stoops, steps and railings presented to the Boards of Architectural Review are prepared by a professional designer; however, such a professionally prepared submission is not mandatory.

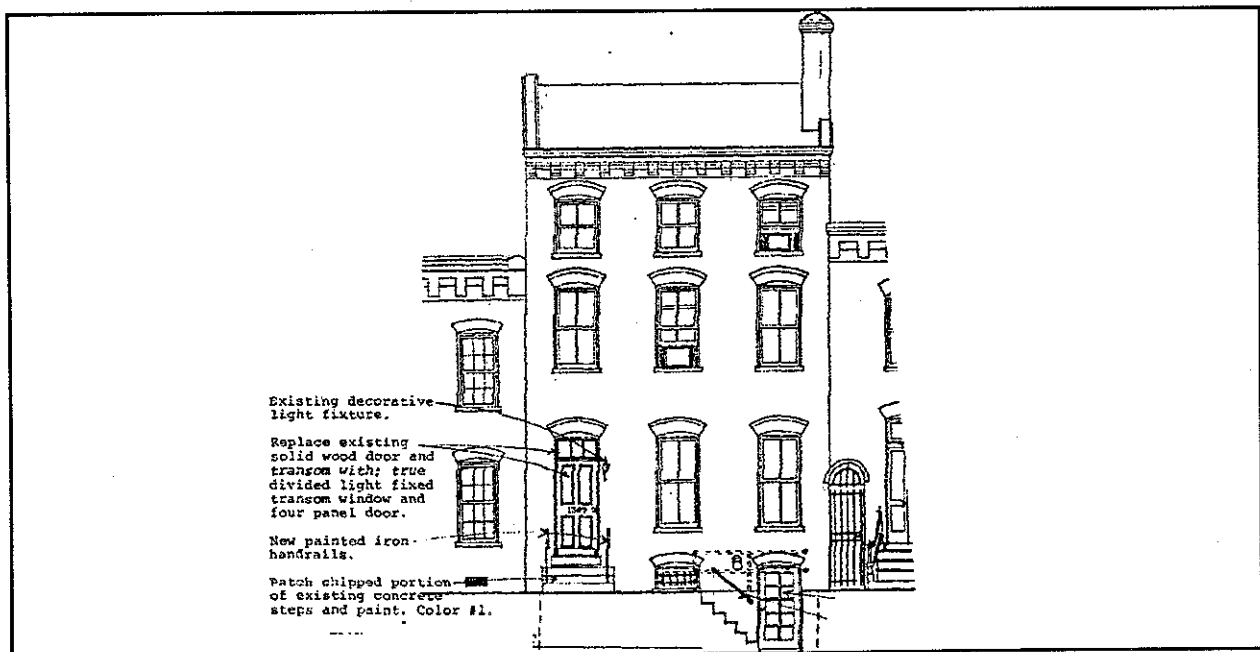
All applications for approval of stoops, steps and railings must contain the following information:

Alexandria Business License

Proof of a valid Alexandria Business License is required at the time of application for contractors, subcontractors, architects, and designers.

Photograph of Existing Building

Clear photographs of the existing building are required for reference.



Rehabilitation scheme for building entrance and stairs.

SOURCE: 1307 Prince Street, BAR Case #91-189, Burns & Associates, Architects

Plot Plan

A plot plan accurately showing the location of the proposed stoop, steps and/or railings in relation to the building is required.

Size

The drawing must accurately indicate the dimensions of the proposed stoop, steps and/or railings.

Materials

The materials to be used for the stoop, steps and/or railings must be specified.

Color

The proposed color of the stoop, steps and/or railings must be indicated and an actual color sample provided.

RELATED SECTIONS

Accessibility for Persons with Disabilities

Porches

Decks

NOTE: Illustrations are provided for information only. Applications for certificates of appropriateness are reviewed and approved on a case-by-case basis.

ADOPTED BY THE BOARDS OF
ARCHITECTURAL REVIEW, 5/25/93